

JEANETTE LOCKE RUSSELL ("Aunt Nettie")

Aunt Nettie is one of the members of the family who I associate invariably with interior spaces; I do not, in other words, associate Aunt Nettie with the out-of-doors. The interior spaces that immediately come to mind are 35 River Street (where she and Aunt Jennie lived after they moved out of the Russell Homestead after the marriage of WAR and OEL) and the ward in the Carbondale General Hospital on the ground level in the back on the right (where Aunt Nettie reigned for about the last decade of her life). At 35 River Street, I can clearly see Aunt Nettie in the kitchen and in the sitting room/library. In the ward in the hospital Aunt Nettie had the corner bed (far corner on the left as you walked in). I'm sure that must have been regarded as a choice spot, and I am certain that Aunt Nettie had no difficulty in obtaining that spot, for the very particular reason that she easily outlived the occupant of that spot. I wonder if that was the first bed that she was assigned to in that ward? That is, to be sure, a possibility. I wonder how many times Aunt Nettie out-lived all of the occupants of that ward? Very frequently we would stop in for a visit on our way home from church. Aunt Nettie was always ready to receive, and would glow when we called. I'm sure Mom regularly--if not always--took a "treat" for Aunt Nettie, her father's sister. That seems to be one of the unwritten laws--when you visit someone in a hospital, you take them a treat. The visit in itself is, of course, the most wonderful treat, but somehow one always feels compelled to take along something more tangible, like candy, for example. One thing for certain, Aunt Nettie always had candy, and she always freely and repeatedly offered candy to us when we visited. Without moving from where she sat (in bed) she seemed to be able to reach in several directions and produce box after box of candy. She had the wonderful habit of freely discussing the characteristics and maladies of the other occupants of the beds in the ward, and not always in hushed tones. I wonder if she pointed them out, or described their locations without pointing? At one time, one of the occupants of the ward was Viola Russell, Aunt Nettie's sister-in-law. As I type this I recall that Aunt Nettie used to walk us down the hall on our way out of the hospital. I do recall that Aunt Nettie was always very happy to see us. She was not one of those people who mope and sulk and inflict their bad moods on others. When we came calling it was a joyous occasion. I'm sure it was a very pleasurable experience for Aunt Nettie to walk us down the hall on our way out of the hospital. She could walk along and implicitly proclaim "This is my niece and these are her children." HLRP was very good to her Aunts Nettie and Jennie. The frequent hospital visits to Aunt Nettie were just one of the ways that HLRP was good to Aunt Nettie. There was a television in the ward. One of the things I can not picture Aunt Nettie doing is watching television. Somehow it seems impossible that Aunt Nettie could have lived into the television era, having been born during the Civil War era as she was. I think Aunt Nettie enjoyed very much her stay in the General Hospital. She was not severely ill during those years; she was in the hospital because, given her advanced age, it was not wise for her to continue to live alone. To be healthy and, at the same time, to be gregarious, and to occupy a bed in a ward in a small town hospital means, among other things, that all of that small town, at one time or another, passes, invariably, by. Given my present interest in writing the family history, it is hard to think about Aunt Nettie and not to say to myself: "If only I had asked Aunt Nettie about this or about that..." One can not feel guilty about not having asked certain historical questions. The questions either were or were not asked, and that's that.

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